



Presbyterian Aged Care

## **A Biblical Basis for Aged Care Ministry**

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Presbyterian Aged Care (PAC) is a ministry of the Presbyterian Church in NSW/ACT. Hence, an important part of considering our Mission and Values is to understand from God's word the Biblical basis as to why and how we should care for older people.

### **The Rationale for Church engagement in Aged Care Ministry**

There are several reasons why the church should be engaged in the ministry of aged care. The first reason should be because of a desire to love others arising out of gratitude for what God did in sending His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to redeem us from the power of sin and death (1 John 4:9-11). Since God so loved us, our mission, as individuals and as a church, should be to show his love to those in need, including older people, as reflected in the nature of our ministry including our core values.

A second reason is because we are called, as God's people, to reflect God's particular concern to defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow (Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 68:5-6). God's concern for the aged is expressed in passages such as Isaiah 46:4 where He promises to sustain and rescue those of old age and grey hairs (Isaiah 46:4). Naomi in the Book of Ruth is an excellent example of how God cared for a widow in dire straits. Indeed, both in the Book of Ruth and in the New Testament we see that God has called His people, as well as family members, to take responsibility for the widowed and aged and make provision for them (cf. 1 Timothy 5:3-10). One of the most powerful examples in Scripture of the Lord's care for older people is John 19:25 where despite the agony he was suffering on the cross, Jesus provides for his mother's needs by asking the Apostle John (a non-relative) to take his mother into his home. It is the Lord's example here which provides a model for Christian care to older people and their families as we minister to the needs of non-relatives and strangers who come to our churches or to live in our church-run aged care facilities.

Thirdly, aged care ministry also provides many opportunities for God's people to fulfill the Great Commission and make the Gospel known to consumers, their families and staff members (Matthew 28:16-20). Many of those who come into our care may not have had a close or meaningful relationship with God in the past and are often searching for meaning and purpose in their lives as they near their life's end. Through the provision of spiritual activities, developing close relationships and modelling God's love, God's people

frequently have the opportunity to share the good news of the Gospel of Christ, encourage new believers and inspire them to look forward to the promise of eternal life (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:3; 1 Peter 3:15).

## **Biblical Values underlying Aged Care Ministry**

How then, should the church be engaged in aged care? What principles or values should be adopted in caring for the aged? Some of the most important core values in caring for others that are found in scripture include showing compassion, being inclusive, acting with integrity and encouraging others.

### **Showing Compassion**

Compassion is understood in both the Old and New Testaments as the quality of showing kindness or favour, of being gracious, or of having pity or mercy. The prophets and other men of God were deeply aware of the wonder of God's mercy to sinful people. They taught that anyone who had experienced God's grace and mercy in their lives should be moved to have compassion on others, especially the fatherless, the widow and the stranger (Deuteronomy 10:18; Jeremiah 22:3).

Jesus taught, especially in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that compassion should be shown by his followers to anyone who needs his help (Luke 10:25-37). He reflected his Father's compassion in the way he healed diseases and infirmities, cast out evil spirits, fed hungry people and had compassion on a widow by raising her son from the dead (Mark 1:29-45; Matthew 14: 13-21; Luke 7:11-17). Likewise, in caring for the aged, we should demonstrate care and compassion in the way we serve them.

Jesus' compassion for others is a reflection of the truth that all people, including older people, no matter how incapacitated they are physically, mentally or emotionally, are uniquely created and are made in God's image. Accordingly, they should be cared for and loved as if we were serving the Lord himself (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 25:40; Mark 12:31). We all have intrinsic dignity and worth in the eyes of God, and that does not diminish with age or infirmity. Indeed achieving old age is celebrated in the Bible. When people like Abraham (Genesis 25:8) and David (1 Chronicles 29:28) achieve advanced old age, the Biblical writers say this indicates God's blessing on them.

Consistent with this principle is that those in our care should be treated in a holistic manner. God created men and woman with a body and a soul, which correspond with the outer and inner person. This is clear from passages such as Matthew 10:28 and 2 Corinthians 4:16. Why is this Biblical category important? Paul makes it clear that while the outer body may be wasting away, the inner person can still be inwardly renewed. This highlights the importance of providing spiritual encouragement as an essential ingredient of care. Also, we need to acknowledge that diseases of old age can impact on the spiritual motivation and behaviour of people. Alternatively, a person's spiritual condition can also have a significant impact on the person's physical

health, especially via psychosomatic illness. This body/soul dichotomy, evident in the Biblical definition of a person, shows that holistic care is essential if we are to care for older people in a Biblical and compassionate manner. We can't afford to ignore either the medical or the spiritual aspect of care if we are aiming to please our Lord. It should be the focus on holistic care that sets PAC apart from other secular or non-religious aged care providers.

### **Being Inclusive of others**

As all people are made in God's image and are precious to Him, so God's people are called to care for others irrespective of their racial background or material situation. Accordingly, we are called to be inclusive of others and serve them with a spirit of openness. The Bible describes God as one who accepts no partiality and accepts no bribes (Deuteronomy 10:17) and accordingly, Moses instructs the people not to select judges who pervert justice or show partiality. Similarly, James describes the wisdom that comes from above as including the qualities of being impartial and sincere (James 3:17).

In the Gospels, Jesus illustrates that neighbourly love encompasses caring for anyone in need irrespective of their nationality or personal or material circumstances (Luke 10:25-37). For instance, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus illustrates that neighbourly love encompasses caring for anyone in need irrespective of their nationality or material circumstances (Luke 10:25-37). In his ministry, Jesus made a point of reaching out to those who others considered 'unclean' such as those afflicted with leprosy or those who were poor or outcast (eg. Mark 2:15-17; 10:46-52; Luke 5:12-16). He emphasised in his teaching that kindness and hospitality should be shown to those such as the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind (Luke 14:12-24). Accordingly, in order to be faithful as God's people, we should aim where practicable, to provide care, concern and hospitality to anyone - no matter what their background or past circumstances may be.

Being inclusive in our dealings with others also implies that we act justly and fairly in our relationship with them. As stated by the prophet Micah, the Lord requires his people to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8). James warns about the danger of showing favouritism towards people who are rich, while discriminating against those who are poor in the eyes of the world. Such actions break God's law (James 2:1-13).

### **Acting with Integrity**

Integrity is a core value which was demonstrated by Christ himself in his ministry and acknowledged even by his enemies (Matthew 22:16). As such, integrity is a value that should underlie the care of older people. Integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. It is a quality of character that pleases God and should be a mark of those who follow Christ. David recognised that God is the one who tests our hearts and is pleased with

integrity (1 Chronicles 29:17), while Paul encouraged Titus as his fellow worker to show integrity in his teaching and way of life (Titus 2:7).

How then can integrity be expressed? One way of demonstrating integrity is through upholding personal and corporate honesty and transparency in all our dealings with others. In Luke 16:10, Jesus says that whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. But not only are we called to be honest in our dealings with others. We are also entrusted to show integrity in being good stewards of the resources which have been entrusted to us. This is clear from the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Perhaps the best indication as to whether we are reflecting integrity in our dealings with others, concerns our attitude of heart. Paul says in Philippians 2:3-4:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your interests, but also to the interests of others.

Integrity is also expressed in our willingness to take responsibility for the decisions we make and the actions we take. For instance, King David was known as a Godly king. But at one time during his reign, he made a decision to commit adultery with Bathsheba and arrange for her husband, Uriah to be killed. When confronted by Nathan the prophet, David took responsibility for his actions and acknowledged that he had sinned against the Lord. Like David, we too can fail and make wrong decisions because we are blind to the effects of sin in our lives. So to maintain our integrity, we need to acknowledge our mistakes before God, and where appropriate, before others, seek their forgiveness, learn from our mistakes and grow in Godly wisdom and character.

Integrity is also expressed in holding to the highest ethical standards and moral principles in the care that we provide to our consumers. This will, of necessity, require us to uphold God's sovereignty over the domain of life and death. This truth is encapsulated in the commandment in Exodus 20:13 not to kill, including taking the initiative to terminate life, however well-intentioned the practice of euthanasia may be. Indeed, Job acknowledges God's sovereignty in matters of life and death, when after the devastating loss of his sons and daughters exclaims "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:21). Instead, rather than taking life, we are called to care for those in the last stages of life by providing high quality palliative care which may include the provision of pain relief.

### **Encouraging Others**

The command to encourage others is found throughout the Bible. God gives us the spiritual gift of encouragement to help build up and edify others as they face life's trials and disappointments (Romans 12:8). The Greek word for encouragement (*parakaleo*) is used in at least three different senses in the New Testament. It can mean to exhort, to entreaty or edify others, or to comfort or console.

The primary means of encouraging one another is through applying God's truth to the situations which people face. For example, Paul encourages those who are concerned about death by reminding them of the good news of the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11). The spiritual aspect of care was modelled by Jesus himself, who demonstrated repeatedly his deep spiritual concern for people. His main purpose on earth was to seek and save the lost (eg. Luke 19:1-10). And so a crucial aspect of the provision of spiritual care is our calling as God's people to share the good news of the Gospel with those who are spiritually in need, including older people, as well as encouraging others in their faith in the Lord. God's desire is that he wants no-one to perish but everyone to come to repentance and have a saving faith in Christ (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, PAC, as a Christian organisation, has a responsibility to ensure that all those associated with PAC, including residents who seek to know God better in their lives and experience his grace, have opportunities to hear and respond to the Gospel, be encouraged to grow in their relationship with Him and look forward to the promise of eternal life (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Timothy 4:2-4; John 3:16).

We can edify or encourage others by upholding their integrity and recognising their potential, for example, the way Paul encouraged Onesimus (Philemon 10) and the encouragement Barnabas showed to Paul and John Mark (Acts 9:27, 13:13,15:37). In aged care ministry, this highlights the importance of adopting practices such working as a team, encouraging each other, sharing our knowledge and experience, adopting best practice techniques, thinking innovatively, recognising each other's gifts and abilities and supporting staff and volunteers to develop their skills and achieve satisfaction in serving others.

We can also provide encouragement through comforting and consoling those who suffer. As God comforts us in our trials, so we should show the same comfort or consolation to those suffering trials or hardship (2 Corinthians 1:4). In aged care ministry, we are called to minister to a segment of the population who are prone to suffering. As a result of the fall, we live in a world of chaos and decay. All of us face the deterioration of our bodies, including sickness and death as well as the effects of sin. Older people, in particular, face losses in their lives as they face death of loved ones, declining health, leaving their homes and loved ones. For example, Barzillai says to King David, "How many more years will I live, that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king? I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is good and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of men and women singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king?" (2 Samuel 19:34-35) Older people deserve excellence in medical, spiritual and emotional care and should be given every encouragement to grow spiritually and emotionally in the face of suffering, as they are able, and to understand and experience the love of God as expressed through Christ and those who serve him (1 Peter 4:1-2; 2 Cor 10:10; Romans 5:3-11).

## **Summary**

In summary, PAC aims to glorify God and serve His church in the way we care for our consumers, staff and carers, by upholding the following core values which are reflected in His word:

- **We are compassionate**
- **We are inclusive**
- **We act with integrity**
- **We encourage others**